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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0521
INFO RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 0001
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0119
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0449
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 0001
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0002
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 0001
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 0051
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 0475
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO
RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 0001
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 0001
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0001
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0001
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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SUBJECT: Colombian MFA Sounds Alarm about Citizenship Fraud

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On October 15, 2009 AmEmb Bogota's consular Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU) met with the head of the passport office at the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Mauricio Acero. Acero requested the meeting to alert FPU to a fraud trend whereby foreign nationals fraudulently obtain Colombian civil documents which are then used to request passports. Investigations by the MFA have led to the revocation of fraudulently-obtained passports of 24 individuals, while 340 cases remain under investigation. The cases most frequently involve people of Lebanese descent, but also Syrians, Palestinians, Jordanians, Venezuelans, and Cubans. END SUMMARY.

Citizenship fraud begins with civil documents

12. (SBU) Acero highlighted that Colombia's civil documents system is ripe for fraud as the requirements for obtaining birth certificates are lenient. Once an individual is in possession of a Colombian birth certificate they can obtain a national identification number, which is then used to get a passport. With a valid national ID, the MFA is required by law to issue a passport. Acero requested that Embassy personnel voice concern about gaps in citizenship procedures in the course of high-level contacts with the Colombian government.

Fraud indicators

13. (SBU) The perpetrators of citizenship fraud, according to Acero, tend to be male and between the ages of 20-25. They often use a baptism certificate to establish their place of birth (instead of the customary hospital certification of birth) and claim to have

been born at home. Often the two mandatory witnesses of the birth will be indigenous. The birth certificate, national identification card and passport will often have issuance dates in close proximity. In the case of Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, and Jordanians the subject's first (paternal) last name will be Arab and the second (maternal) last name will be Spanish. Through a series of legal procedures, the paternal last name is dropped over time. The cases tend to come from Maicao, San Andres, Barranquilla, and Ipiales.

Motivations to commit citizenship fraud

14. (SBU) Acero told FPU that Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, and Jordanians are motivated to obtain Colombian citizenship to hide criminal records, avoid military service in their home country, provide a better future for their children, and for ease in international travel. The motivations for Cubans and Venezuelans, on the other hand, are less clear. Acero hypothesized that some Cubans might wish to escape the regime while others might be using

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a Colombian identity as a cover for Cuban intelligence operations. As for Venezuelans, he said that the motivations are still unclear.

Comment

15. (SBU) FPU spoke with other agencies at Post about the trend. They noted that this is an on-going issue and concurred that the motives tend to be to hide criminal backgrounds.

16. (SBU) While Acero did not point to specific malfeasance involving U.S. visas, FPU appreciated the information and is on the look-out for the fraud indicators highlighted. FPU requested the names of the 340 individuals under investigation for citizenship fraud. The request is under consideration by the MFA.
BROWNFIELD